perceived by the physical senses. Nature was idealized and the Taoists sought to merge themselves in it. Man's conduct, they argued, should conform to the *Tao,* and this was held to be *wu wei,* often roughly translated as "inaction," hut better defined as a way of "doing everything by doing-nothing." It must be noted, however, that some modern scholars maintain that the mystical elements were not well developed until much later, and that their importance in Chou Taoism has been exaggerated.

The Taoists were in opposition to the elaborate ritual, the carefully reasoned codes of ethics, the earnest—and at times pedantic and painful—cultivation of character, and the intellectual approach of Confucianism. They were not exclusively concerned with the salvation of society, but when they did talk about it they maintained that it was to be achieved by abandoning the elaborate ceremonies and organization of current civilization and by returning to primitive manners and conforming to the quiet simplicity of the ceaselessly operating *Tao.* People must not be taught nor their desires awakened by learning. In their political and social theories the Taoists were closely akin to the philosophic anarchists of the Occident. The early Taoists may well have represented the protest of rural districts, of thoughtful commoners, and of aristocrats at odds with their own class, against the elaborate civilization of the towns whose growth seems to have been a feature of the middle and later centuries of the Chou and in opposition to the domination of that official aristocracy of which the Confucian school was a bulwark. It has also been suggested—although on grounds which are probably much less tenable—that Confucianism represented the civilization of the older

centers in the North, and Taoism that of the Yangtze Valley, especially Ch'u. Whatever the reason for the difference, Confucianism and Taoism were certainly at variance.

It is not strange that Taoism, with its talk of the unreality of the visible world and of conformity with the *Tao,* should degenerate in popular practice to the search for an elixir by which to achieve immortality and for means of transmuting baser metals into gold. The decay seems to have begun before the end of the Chou. Certainly it proceeded very rapidly in succeeding centuries. It was not unnatural, moreover, that those who professed to master the demons with which Chinese fancy peopled the